

THE LIBERTY "76" BOYS OF '76

A Weekly Magazine containing Stories of the American Revolution.

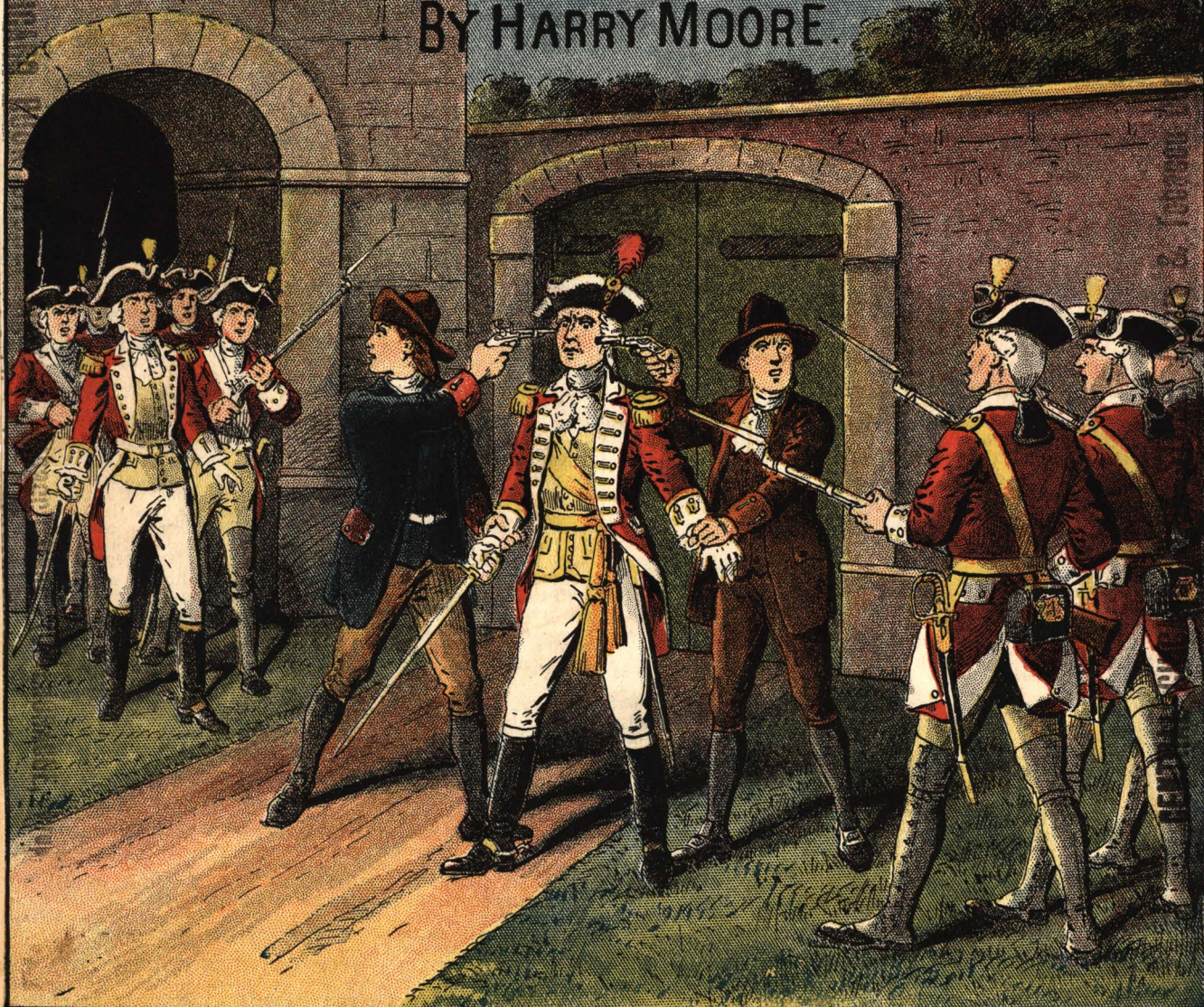
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No. 22.

NEW YORK, MAY 31, 1901.

Price 5 Cents.

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CHAPTER I.

CORNWALLIS BAFFLED.

Boom! Boom!

Boom! Boom! B-oo-oo-oo-m!

Cannon were roaring.

It was the first week in the month of February, of the year 1781.

Cornwallis, the British general, and Greene, the patriot general, had been opposed to each other in the Carolinas during the past winter.

Cornwallis had tried to strike the little army under Greene a blow that would crush it, but had been foiled.

He had sent Tarleton, "The Butcher," to attack a portion of the American army under General Morgan, at the Cowpens, and Tarleton's army had been almost annihilated.

Out of his entire force of eleven hundred men, only two hundred and seventy of Tarleton's men escaped.

Two hundred and thirty were killed and wounded; six hundred were taken prisoners.

In addition, Morgan had captured two fieldpieces and a thousand stand of arms, besides wagons laden with baggage and provisions.

The Cowpens had been worse than a Waterloo for Tarleton.

Only twelve patriot soldiers were killed at the Cowpens, and sixty-one were wounded.

It was indeed a remarkable battle.

General Cornwallis was only thirty miles away to the westward, however.

General Morgan knew this.

He knew also that Cornwallis had nearly three thousand men.

He knew further that Cornwallis would be wild with anger when Tarleton reached him with the news of his disastrous defeat.

He realized that the British general would use every effort to try to rescue the six hundred English prisoners, and annihilate the patriot army.

General Morgan had only one thousand men.

He could not hope to give successful battle to Cornwallis' force of three times his own.

He would have to retreat if he expected to hold the prisoners and other things which he had captured.

The Catawba River lay fifty miles to the eastward.

If he could reach that and cross it before Cornwallis could head him off, he would be all right, he thought.

At any rate, he would be in better shape than he was at present.

He made up his mind to try to accomplish it, anyway.

He decided that it was his only hope.

So he gave the order to march soon after nightfall of the day on which the battle of the Cowpens took place, viz.: January 17, 1781.

The men were so jubilant because of their wonderful victory over the British that they were ready to march.

And march they did, all night long, through the pouring rain.

They reached and crossed the Broad River next morning, and continued on toward the Little Catawba.

They crossed this two days ahead of Cornwallis, who had been delayed, waiting for reinforcements, which came up from Camden to join him.

Cornwallis was so chagrined and angry when he found that Morgan had gotten across the Little Catawba ahead of him, that he burned all the army's baggage, with the exception of three or four wagons for carrying the sick and wounded, and the ammunition.

He did this so that his men would have nothing to retard them in their march.

They could make good speed, and he hoped to be able to catch Morgan before he could reach and cross the Big Catawba.

But he failed, although he was not far behind.

His army reached the river late in the evening, and the patriot army had finished crossing only a short time before.

Cornwallis decided to wait till morning to cross, as his men were very tired.

This decision cost him considerable delay, as it set in to rain soon after dark, and rained all night long.

Next morning the Catawba was a roaring torrent, and could not be forded.

Morgan thus got the start once more.

Cornwallis got across the next morning, however, and again started in pursuit.

General Greene, who had hastened up from Cheraw, on the Great Pedee, as soon as he learned of Morgan's success in the battle of the Cowpens, joined General Morgan the morning after he crossed the Catawba, and took command, as Morgan was down sick with rheumatism.

Cornwallis chased the patriot force fiercely, and gradually cut down the lead it had secured through the delay caused him by the high waters of the Catawba.

He was not far behind at Salisbury, and he was closer still when Greene reached the Yadkin River, but when the British advance guard reached the river the last boatload of patriots had crossed.

When Cornwallis came up and found that his prey had escaped him, he was furious.

He ordered the cannon to be gotten in place, and the patriot encampment bombarded.

This was done, and so, now, on this morning of which we write, the British gunners were hard at work, doing their best to do some damage.

In the distance they could see the top of a log cabin.

The cabin was well sheltered by rocks.

Some one said that the patriot generals, Greene and Morgan had taken up their quarters in the cabin.

It was probably a guess, on the part of the redecoats, but as it happened, it was a good one.

Generals Greene and Morgan had taken up their quarters in the cabin.

It was so well sheltered that they felt safe, even though within range of the cannon of the British.

The British gunners were pretty good ones, however.

The cannon-balls begun dropping around in the vicinity of the cabin.

An officer entered the cabin and informed General Greene of the fact that the British gunners had evidently selected the cabin as a mark, and asked if it would not be a wise precaution to vacate the cabin.

General Greene asked Morgan's opinion.

The old veteran was suffering so greatly from rheumatism that he said that if it was left to him, he would stay in the cabin.

"I'd rather risk the cannon-balls of the British than endure the pain of being moved from here," he said.

"We'll stay here, then," said Greene, quietly.

And they did stay.

The officer withdrew from the cabin, and General Greene returned to his work of writing orders and dispatches.

While he was thus engaged, a cannon-ball came through the roof of the cabin.

It went on through, and out at the farther side, but the splinters and pieces of shingles rattled down around General Greene's head at a great rate.

He glanced up, brushed the splinters and bits of shingles away, and calmly went on writing.

"They're getting too free with us, altogether, General," remarked Morgan, coolly.

"So they are. Well, they are angry because of our escape. One cannot blame them for hurling a few thunderbolts this way."

"No, I suppose not."

Presently General Greene summoned an orderly.

"Send Dick Slater to me," he said.

The orderly bowed and withdrew.

Ten minutes later a handsome, browned young man perhaps twenty-one years entered the cabin.

"You sent for me, General Greene?" he asked, as he saluted.

"Yes, Dick; I wish you to take a message to Huger, instructing him to hasten northward as rapidly as possible and join me at Guilford."

"Very well, sir; I will start at once."

Dick took the message, placed it in his pocket, and then saluted and withdrew.

Dick was soon riding out of the encampment and away toward the southeast.

He did not know exactly where to look for Huger, the general, with the main body of patriots, was moving northward.

He knew about where the general should be, however, and he shaped his course so as to head him off.

Dick succeeded.

He reached the patriot force late that evening, at a point nearly forty miles southeastward from where he had left the other portion of the patriot army, on the bank of the Yadkin.

He delivered the message, and when General Huger had read it, he said:

"Tell General Greene his order shall be obeyed to the letter.

"Very well, sir," replied Dick.

He had intended to start on his return that same evening, but it set in to rain and he decided to remain in the patriot encampment till morning.

This he did.

He was away bright and early next morning, however, and he shaped his course so as to intercept the patriot force.

which would, he knew, be enroute for Guilford, and he reached it that evening.

Dick made his report to General Greene.

"Good!" said Greene. "Perhaps when we reach Guilford we will be in a position to give General Cornwallis the battle he seems to be wanting so bad."

"You are looking for reinforcements in the way of new recruits there?" asked General Morgan.

"Yes; I sent word to Governor Thomas Jefferson, asking him to send recruits."

Morgan shook his head.

"I have doubts about your finding any recruits there," he said.

"Why so?"

"Because of the fact that that scoundrelly traitor, Arnold, has been giving the people of Virginia and North Carolina so much trouble. I think they have need of most of their available men at home."

Greene looked thoughtful.

"You may be right," he said, "though I hope to find that you are wrong in thinking thus."

"I hope I will be wrong, too," said Morgan, "but I am afraid I will prove to be right."

The march was kept up steadily toward Guilford.

It was almost heart-breaking to see the manner in which the soldiers suffered, however.

Very few of the men had shoes, scarcely any had coats, and there were no blankets.

It was cold, too, at night, even in this southern climate.

The ground froze at night and thawed out in the day-time.

In the morning the crust would hold the soldiers up; at midday the mud would be half knee-deep.

It was terrible, but the brave fellows bore it bravely.

The streams were all swollen from the rains, and the majority of the bridges were gone, but Greene pressed forward persistently.

On the 9th of February the little army, then having reached Guilford and gone into camp, was joined by the main body under General Huger.

Even then General Greene's force was inferior to the British force under Cornwallis.

Greene had but two thousand men, while Cornwallis had three thousand—the flower of his army, picked men, all of them.

As General Morgan had prognosticated, there were no recruits from Virginia or North Carolina there waiting to join Greene.

The patriot commander was disappointed.

His scouts, whom he had left behind at the Yadkin to watch Cornwallis, reported that the British commander had started northward, up the river, with his army.

Greene knew what this meant.

Cornwallis was going up the river to where it would be shallow enough to ford.

He would cross and advance upon Guilford.

He would be there in a very few days, General Greene was confident.

The question then was, should he remain where he was and give Cornwallis battle, or should he continue to retreat?

General Greene decided to call a council of war.

He did so.

He found that it was the unanimous opinion of his officers that they were in no condition to offer successful battle to the British.

General Greene thought so, also.

"Then we will have to continue our retreat," he said, sadly; "we will have to march to the Dan River and cross it. Then we will be safe, as Cornwallis will have no boats with which to get his army across the river."

"It will be a race," said one of the officers; "the British are in light marching order, and will make good time."

"Yes, it will be a race," agreed General Greene; "but we will beat them—we must beat them!"

CHAPTER II.

A MASTERLY RETREAT.

Having decided, General Greene began to act.

Promptness was necessary.

The first thing the General did was to send the heavy baggage ahead.

The next and most important thing was to select a rear guard.

This would have to consist of the strongest, swiftest, bravest and best men in the army.

Theirs would be the duty of fighting off the vanguard of the British when it should appear—which it would be certain to do before the patriot army could reach the Dan River.

For this service General Greene selected Howard's infantry, the riflemen, and all the cavalry, made up largely of Dick Slater's company of "Liberty Boys."

Colonel Williams was placed in command of this force, which numbered, all told, seven hundred men.

This rear guard was the best men in the army—veterans, men who had been tried time and again and had never been found wanting.

This having been decided upon, the men were separated from the main body of the army.

The rear guard remained behind, while the main force marched away.

Greene went with this force, and took the main road.

Colonel Williams took another road which ran parallel with the one the main force was on, and still farther over was another road.

Up this road this British were advancing.

They were as yet several miles away, but they were coming swiftly.

Cornwallis was eager to get even with the patriots for the terrible drubbing which Tarleton had received at the Cowpens.

Colonel Williams was as brave as a lion, and was, moreover, shrewd and keen.

If the advance guard of the British passed him, they would have to get up very early in the morning.

General Greene could not have selected a better man to cover the retreat of the army.

And in Dick Slater and his band of brave "Liberty Boys" Colonel Williams knew he had some aids who were each and every one a host within himself.

The "Liberty Boys" were well mounted, and they were deputed to bring up the rear.

They remained a mile or more behind the infantry and riflemen.

This would make it difficult for the British to get near enough to do much damage.

The "Liberty Boys" would fight the redcoats back, and overhaul the infantry and riflemen; and then the latter would take a hand, and the British would be forced to fall back.

This was the way Colonel Williams figured it, and it turned out to be the case.

The British drew nearer and nearer.

The advance guard consisted of the cavalry and a body of light infantry.

By noon of the first day after Colonel Williams' party started, the British were near enough so that Dick and his comrades exchanged shots with the redcoats.

When night came they went into camp.

Colonel Williams threw out a picket-line a mile long, consisting of men placed one hundred yards apart.

The line extended in a northeasterly direction, half mile, and in a southwesterly direction the same distance.

It would be impossible for the British to get through the line without being discovered.

The men were up at three o'clock next morning, and they marched till nearly the middle of the forenoon before breakfast.

Then they stopped and ate breakfast and waited, resting till the British came in sight.

Then they were away again.

It snowed, rained and sleeted during the more than ten days that this race was kept up, and although the men were barefooted and insufficiently clothed, they kept on up and down, murmuringly.

They were veterans; they were brave-hearted men who were determined to have their liberty or die.

On the third morning, as the men were eating breakfast a picket came in and announced that the advance guard of the British was close at hand.

Dick and the "Liberty Boys" leaped into the saddles and rode swiftly back a few rods where they secreted themselves in the timber.

They had been there but a few minutes when they saw the redcoats coming.

"Wait till they get close," cautioned Dick; "then at the word, go for them!"

The "Liberty Boys" waited.

The British cavalymen came on rapidly.

They did not look for an ambush.

Dick waited till the enemy was close at hand, and then he gave the order:

"Fire!"

Crash!

The weapons of the "Liberty Boys" spoke, and fifteen of the redcoats fell from their horses.

"Charge!"

Dick's voice was loud and clear.

Out from the shelter of the timber rode the "Liberty Boys."

They uttered cheers as they advanced, and the next moment the two parties came together with a crash.

A couple of the "Liberty Boys" went to the ground, and eight or ten of the redcoats went down.

The British became seized with a panic, and all who could do so fled back toward the main army.

Dick and his comrades captured a dozen of the redcoats, however.

They hastened on after Colonel Williams and his men. All day long the race went on.

The news of the encounter reached Cornwallis and he was wild.

He ordered his men to redouble their exertions.

"We will have them when the Dan River is reached!" he cried. "They will be unable to get across, and we will have them at our mercy!"

The British were unable to gain much on the patriots, however.

Whenever they did get a bit close the rear guard would halt and fire a volley into the redcoat ranks.

This would check the advance quickly.

Night came on, and the patriots stopped and went into camp.

They were up bright and early next morning.

While they were eating, a messenger came from General Greene.

The message which the man brought was that the greater portion of the wagons and baggage was over the Dan River, and that the troops were beginning to cross.

Instantly a great cheer went up from the soldiers.

Their splendid work in holding the British in check had been successful.

Their comrades would soon be across the Dan, and in a place of safety.

The British were near enough so that they could hear the cheering, and doubtless they wondered what it meant.

They were to soon find out.

The soldiers started immediately.

They marched to the river, and reached it well in advance of the pursuing British.

They entered the boats and were taken across to the other side.

They were safe at last.

Cornwallis and his army came up to the bank of the Dan, only to realize that their intended prey had escaped.

The British commander wondered how it had come about that the patriots had found all the boats there in readiness for use.

He had no idea that General Greene, with admirable foresight, had sent a messenger from Cheraw, down on the great Pedee, nearly three weeks before, with instructions to see to it that the boats were gathered up for this very purpose, but such was the case.

The British general was an angry man.

He used language such as an ordinary, common man might be expected to use when he is very angry.

But this did him no good.

It did not help him in the least.

It did not aid him to overcome the insuperable obstacle, the deep, swift-flowing Dan.

Cornwallis waited around a while, and then marched away, going in a southerly direction.

The patriots now went into camp.

They were weary, and they would rest a while.

General Greene's mind was busy.

He was thinking out a plan of action.

He would let his men remain here long enough to become rested, and then he would be up and doing.

Meantime he wished to keep watch of Cornwallis, so as to know what the British were doing, or what they intended trying to do.

The general sent for Dick Slafer.

Dick soon put in an appearance.

"Dick," said the general, "I have some work for you."

"I am glad of that, sir," the youth replied, promptly. "I am never so well satisfied as when at work."

"I believe you, my boy. Well, you are the man for this work, I am sure. It is in your line; the same kind of work which you have done so much of for the commander-in-chief during the past five years."

"Scouting and spying?"

"Scouting and spying—and especially the latter. I wish you to follow the British, Dick. I wish you to see where they go, and then come back and report to me. If you can, by any hook or crook, discover what the intentions of the British are, so much the better."

"I will do my best, sir."

"I am sure of that, Dick."

Dick conversed with the general for some time, receiving instructions and suggestions, and then took his departure.

He went back to where the "Liberty Boys" were quartered.

He told the boys he was to go away on a spying and scouting expedition.

"I'm going along, Dick!" declared Bob Estabrook, a bright-faced but bronzed young man of about Dick's age. "You are not going to get away without me."

Bob was Dick's bosom friend.

The two were old playmates, old schoolmates; they had lived neighbors to each other all their lives. They were in love with each other's sister.

So Bob spoke determinedly.

Nor did Dick have the heart to refuse.

He knew how disappointed Bob would be if he were left behind.

So he told Bob he might accompany him.

"I may wish to send some news to General Greene before I am ready to return, myself, and you can bring it," he said.

"Of course!" agreed Bob.

He would have agreed to almost anything to get to accompany Dick.

The youths went to a farmhouse, which was on a hill, about half a mile away.

They succeeded in procuring a couple of old homespun suits of clothes.

These they brought back to camp and donned in place of the ragged Continental uniforms which they wore.

"There isn't much left of these uniforms," said Dick, with a smile; "but there is sufficient to proclaim the fact that we are patriots, and that is what we do not wish to proclaim where we are going."

"That's right," agreed Bob.

It was nearly evening when the youths finished getting ready for their journey.

They decided to wait till after supper before starting.

They did so.

When they had eaten, they went out and bridled and saddled their horses.

Dick went to General Greene's headquarters for a few minutes, to get his final instructions.

Then he returned, and five minutes later the two youths led their horses aboard one of the ferryboats and were ferried across the river.

Bidding good-by to the boatman, the youths mounted and rode away.

They headed toward the south.

That was the direction in which Cornwallis and the British had gone; it was the direction they would go.

The youths rode steadily southward until daylight next morning.

It had been a very dark night, so they had been forced to go slowly.

They had not ridden out of a walk the whole night through.

The result was that they had gone only about twenty-five miles.

They stopped at a cabin and asked if they might have breakfast.

"Ef you uns air king's men, you uns kin hev breakfus," was the reply; "but ef you uns hain't king's men, then you uns kain't hev no breakfus!"

"Oh, we're king's men!" replied Dick, promptly. "Who wouldn't be?"

"Then you uns kin hev breakfus. Hop down off'n yo' hosses."

CHAPTER III.

RIDING WITH REDCOATS.

The youths dismounted.

"Have you feed for the horses?" asked Dick.

"Yas; we'll take ther hosses ter ther stable now, an' feed 'em."

He led the way to the stable and the horses were led into stalls and the farmer fed the animals.

Then the three returned to the house and entered.

While the woman of the house was getting breakfast Dick questioned the man.

"Have you seen anything of the British army in the parts?" the youth asked.

"Whut yo' wanter know fur?" asked the man.

He was evidently a suspicious man.

"Myself and friend wish to join the army."

"Oh, thet's it?"

"Yes."

"Waal, then, I don' min' tellin' yo' ez how ther British army passed heer yistiddy."

"Ah, indeed? Then we must not be so very far behind it."

"Yo' air within ten miles uv ther British army."

"That is good news, eh, Bob?" remarked Dick.

"Yes, indeed!" replied Bob.

And so it was.

The youths were anxious to find Cornwallis and his army—though not for the reason given the Tory farmer.

"Where away is the British army?" asked Dick.

"Et's over ter Hillsboro."

"Oh, yes; and it will stay there a while, I suppose."

"I guesses ez how yo' is right. Ginerel Cornwallis he driv ther rebels out uv No'th Calliny, an' he is goin' ter sta et Hillsboro long enuff ter git er lot uv new recroots, an then he is goin' ter go up inter Virginny an' wallop th rebels good!"

"So that's what he is going to do?" remarked Dick. "Well, we will be in time, Bob."

"Yes, so we will."

The youths sat up to the table, when breakfast was read and ate heartily.

They had been riding all night without anything to eat and were hungry.

Just before they had finished eating there came the sound of the hoofbeats of galloping horses.

Dick and Bob exchanged startled glances.

Horsemen in this part of the country would more likely be enemies than friends.

Ten chances to one the horsemen would prove to be redcoats.

The farmer and his wife were looking toward the door and did not see the exchange of glances between the youths.

The farmer got up from the table and went to the door. Opening the door he looked out.

Dick and Bob went on eating.

They were cool and calm.

If they felt inward trepidation, they did not let the fact show in their faces.

"Et's er comp'ny uv British!" cried the farmer.

This announcement was made in a pleased tone, as though he were announcing something which would give pleasure to the hearers.

It didn't please Dick and Bob a bit.

But they did not let the fact show in their expression.

"They've stopped!" announced the farmer a few moments later.

This statement was hardly necessary.

The youths knew by the cessation of the sound of the hoofbeats that the horsemen had come to a stop.

Dick and Bob now arose from the table and walked toward the door.

"We dare not try to run for it," whispered Dick; "we will have to stay and try to brazen it out."

Bob nodded.

When they reached the doorway and looked out, the leader of the company of redcoats was just dismounting.

He strode up to the house and, pausing, addressed the farmer:

"Good morning," he said; "can you tell me how far it is to Hillsboro?"

"Yas, I kin tell yo'," was the reply; "et's ten mile."

"Ten miles, eh?"

"Yas."

"Straight ahead, in the direction we are going?"

"Yas, straight erhead."

"Thank you."

Dick and Bob, when they saw that the redcoat simply wished to ask the distance and direction to Hillsboro, stepped back out of sight.

They hoped that they might not be seen by the redcoats.

Doubtless they would not have been seen, but the farmer, eager to let it be known that he was a loyal king's man, said:

"Thar's er couple uv young fellers in heer ez air goin' r Hillsboro ter jine ther British army. Mebby they'd ke ter go right erlong with ye."

Dick could have kicked the farmer.

It could not be helped, however.

They had said they were king's men, on their way to join the British army, so the farmer was not so much to blame.

The statement naturally aroused the interest of the British officer.

"A couple of fellows on their way to Hillsboro to join the army, eh?" he remarked. "Who are they? Where are they?"

The youths knew they would have to show themselves now.

It would be dangerous, as there might be some one among the redcoats who would recognize them, but they would have to take the chances.

They stepped forward and stood beside the farmer.

"Here we are," remarked Dick, quietly.

He looked searchingly at the redcoat.

He wished to see if he knew him.

Dick had never seen the officer, he was sure.

This caused him to feel relieved.

If he did not know the redcoat, the redcoat would not be likely to know him.

The officer looked at the youths rather searchingly.

"So you wish to join the British army, and fight for the king, do you?" he asked.

"We do," replied Dick, promptly.

"Good! That's the way to talk. Then you might as well come right along with us."

"We haven't finished eating breakfast yet; you needn't wait for us. We'll overtake you before you reach Hillsboro, likely."

Dick hoped the redcoats would go on.

But he was doomed to disappointment.

"Oh, we're in no hurry," was the reply; "we'll wait till you are through with your breakfast."

Although disappointed, the youths did not dare show it.

They had to look pleased whether they felt pleased or not.

"Oh, very well," said Dick; "but you need not bother to wait on us, I assure you. We will catch up with you."

"No; we'll wait."

That settled it.

Dick and Bob could not help themselves.

They could not force the redcoats to go on and leave them to follow.

So they would have to accept the situation and make the best of it.

They were accustomed to doing this.

Their five years of experience in the ranks of the patriot army, and as scouts and spies, had taught them this.

They would have to go on in the company of the redcoats and be on the lookout for a chance to escape.

They had no intention of entering Hillsboro in the company of the redcoats.

It would never do to appear before General Cornwallis. He knew both youths, and would recognize Dick and Bob at once.

They intended to enter Hillsboro, but they wished to do so secretly.

When the officer said they would wait, Dick said, "very well," and he and Bob returned and seated themselves at the table.

"Eat slowly, Bob," whispered Dick; "maybe they will get tired of waiting and go on."

Bob nodded.

The youths had already eaten about all they cared to eat, but they pretended to still be quite hungry.

They ate slowly.

They were determined to kill as much time as possible.

The redcoats might become tired of waiting and go on and leave them.

The youths hoped this would be the case.

But it did not prove to be the case.

The officer remained standing at the door, talking to the farmer.

Presently he called out:

"You fellows must have been very hungry!"

"So we were," replied Dick.

"Hurry a bit, can't you?"

"We are hurrying; but as I told you a while ago, there is no need of your waiting for us. Go on, and we'll overtake you."

"No; we'll wait."

"He sticks like a leech," said Bob, in a low tone.

"He certainly does," agreed Dick.

Seeing that there was no chance of getting rid of the redcoats, the youths stopped making a pretense of eating and rose from the table.

"How much do we owe you?" Dick asked the farmer.

The farmer named a sum and Dick paid it.

"Now we'll go and get our horses," said Dick.

The youths left the house, and, accompanied by the farmer, made their way to the stable.

They had told the farmer they could get the horses, but he insisted on coming along and helping.

The horses had been unbridled, but the saddles had not been removed.

The bridles were put back on the animals and then the youths led the horses out of the stable.

"Well, you're ready, eh?" remarked the officer, as the two approached the front of the house, leading the horses.

"Yes, we're ready," replied Dick.

He saw the officer look searchingly at the horses.

"I half believe he is suspicious of us," thought Dick. "we'll have to be very careful."

The officer led the way out to the road.

Dick and Bob followed, leading their horses.

"Here are a couple of fellows who wish to join the army and fight for the king," the officer explained to his men. "they are going to accompany us to Hillsboro."

The soldiers looked curiously at the youths.

Dick and Bob bore the scrutiny well.

They were old hands.

They had been in too many tight places to be made nervous by their present situation.

They were cool and calm.

Had they really been what they claimed, and eager to join the British army, they could not have appeared so cool and self-possessed.

The officer mounted his horse.

The youths mounted theirs.

"Fall in!" ordered the officer, nodding toward Dick and Bob.

The redcoats opened up a place and the youths entered the ranks of the dragoons.

"Forward!"

The dragoons, with Dick and Bob in their midst, rode away.

The officer turned to the youths when they had gone half mile or so and asked:

"Do you know the road to Hillsboro?"

The youths shook their heads.

"No," replied Dick; "we do not live around here, and are not familiar with the country."

"Ah! From what part of the country are you, then?"

"From the mountains, away to the westward."

"That's it, eh?"

"Yes."

"What made you decide that you wished to join the British army and fight for the king?"

"Oh, the same thing that makes all loyal people wish to fight for the king, I suppose. We wish to do something."

"Well, that is commendable. You will soon have a chance, too."

"That is what we wish, sir."

Dick and Bob could not help noticing that they were objects of considerable interest to the redcoats.

They could not understand it, but it was in truth a very simple matter.

Dick and Bob were supposed to be simple, country youths, but they did not look it.

There was something in their appearance which indicated that they were not ordinary individuals.

There was something masterful in their very air.

Their eyes were keen, clear and bright.

The youths were self-possession personified.

They sat their horses with ease and grace.

The bronzed faces of the youths spoke of much exposure to wind and weather.

In a word, the youths looked like veterans.

The redcoats had seen a sufficient number of the ordinary country people during the time that they had been in America so that they were enabled to notice the difference.

Consequently it was not strange that the British dragoons should eye the youths keenly and with evident interest and curiosity.

"I wonder if they suspect us?" thought Dick.

CHAPTER IV.

THE "SWAMP FOX."

Dick feared that if they did not already suspect them that they would do so.

"We must manage to escape, somehow," he thought.

This was going to be a difficult matter, however.

They were in the midst of nearly a hundred horsemen.

It looked as if any attempt on their part to break through and get away could but result disastrously.

Dick and Bob were no ordinary youths, however.

They had taken many desperate chances during the time that they had been fighting for independence.

They were always ready to take chances.

They would do so again at the first opportunity.

As they rode along, Dick kept up a lively thinking.

He tried to think of some plan of effecting their escape.

This he could not do offhand.

He would have to wait and trust to circumstances to furnish the opportunity.

He and Bob would both be ready to take advantage of the opportunity when it presented itself.

They were now in the open country.

It would not do to attempt to escape here.

Should they attempt to escape at all, they would certainly stand a better chance in the timber than in the open country.

A couple of miles farther on the road entered another forest.

As they rode along, Dick and Bob managed to work their way toward the outer edge of the body of horsemen.

They did it in such a careless manner as to not attract attention.

The redcoats did not suspect that it was done intentionally.

Indeed, it is doubtful if they noticed what the youths were doing.

Since starting, Dick had not, of course, had an opportunity to say a word to Bob.

It was unnecessary to do so, anyway.

Bob understood the situation perfectly.

He knew that they must part company with the redcoats before reaching Hillsboro.

All he would have to do would be to watch Dick.

His comrade's movements would furnish him a cue as to his intention.

As soon as Dick began edging toward the outskirts of the body of horsemen, Bob began doing the same.

He knew what the movement meant.

He understood that as soon as they got in a good position at or near the outer edge of the crowd, and a half-way favorable opportunity presented itself, they would make a break to escape.

Presently, when they had penetrated a distance of perhaps a mile into the timber, Dick saw where another road left the main road.

It was on the side next to them.

Dick gave Bob a quick, meaning look.

Bob understood.

They were to break from among the redcoats and make a dash down this side road.

They occupied a very favorable position for making the attempt.

They were not at the extreme edge of the crowd, but there were only two or three horsemen beyond them.

Just as the party came opposite the branch road, Dick, who was riding close beside a redcoat, turned his heel outward and drove his spur into the flank of the redcoat's horse.

The animal, pained and surprised by this unexpected happening, began leaping and plunging wildly about.

His actions frightened several of the other horses, causing them to shy out to one side.

This made the opening Dick and Bob wished for.

They took advantage of it instantly.

They drove the spurs into the flanks of their animals and

the next moment were dashing down the road leading off to one side.

So quickly had this all been done that the redcoats were taken wholly by surprise.

They thought at first that the youths' horses had become frightened and were running away.

Then they saw differently.

The youths were making no attempt to hold the animals.

Indeed, they were doing all they could to urge them to better speed.

Then it flashed upon the redcoats:

The youths had done this purposely.

They were trying to make their escape.

The thought angered them.

"After them!" yelled the captain of the dragoons, excitedly. "They are rebels and spies, I'll wager! We must capture them! We must not let them escape!"

The entire body of dragoons dashed down the road in pursuit of Dick and Bob.

They entered into the affair with zest.

This would give them sport.

It would be better fun than chasing a wolf or a fox.

They felt confident that they could overtake and capture the youths.

But Dick and Bob were as determined not to be captured as the redcoats could possibly be to capture them.

They urged their horses forward at their best speed.

Behind them, yelling and shouting, came the redcoats.

"You did that all right, Dick," laughed Bob.

"We got out from among them all right, Bob."

"We certainly did."

"We are not yet safe, by any means, however."

"No, I guess we're not. Those fellows will give us a lively chase, I have an idea."

"Yes, they will do their best to catch us."

The youths glanced back over their shoulders.

The redcoats were about a hundred yards behind.

As the youths looked back they saw the redcoats draw and level their pistols.

"They're going to fire! Down on the neck of your horse, Bob!"

Dick threw himself forward on the neck of his horse as he spoke.

Bob instantly did likewise.

Crack! crack! cr-r-r-r-rack!

The redcoats had fired a volley.

None of the bullets took effect, though several came very close.

"I don't care how close they come just so they miss," said Bob, with a smile.

"That is the way I feel about it, too," agreed Dick.

They watched their pursuers closely.

They were eager to see whether or not the redcoats were gaining on them.

The youths soon became satisfied that they were at least holding their own.

This did not entirely satisfy them, however.

If they were to succeed in escaping, they must do more than simply hold their own.

They must draw away from the redcoats.

They urged their horses to renewed exertions.

The redcoats did the same.

Their horses and those of their pursuers increased the speed somewhat, but the distance between pursuers and pursued remained relatively the same.

"Let's try a shot or two at them, Dick," said Bob.

"No, let's don't do that, Bob. You see, they have nothing against us as yet save to suspect us of being patriots but if we should kill one or two of them, they would handle us roughly if they caught us. Doubtless they would string us up to a tree."

"That's so; I guess it will be best not to fire upon them."

"I think so."

The race went on.

Presently the youths were pleased to note that they were drawing away from their pursuers.

Slowly but surely they were increasing the distance between themselves and the redcoats.

The dragoons noticed this fact, also.

They set up fresh yells—of anger now.

They belabored their poor horses in an attempt to force them to hold their own.

They did not succeed very well, however.

The youths' horses had better staying qualities than those ridden by the redcoats.

Presently the road ceased to be a road.

It narrowed down till it was only a path.

It was wide enough for one horse, but not for two abreast.

Dick took the lead, Bob falling in behind.

Dick would not have done this had they been within pistol shot of their pursuers.

In that case the rear horseman would have been in much more danger than the one in front, and he would not have consented to let Bob occupy the more dangerous position.

As it was, he was willing to take the lead.

For aught he knew there might be danger ahead of them.

Onward they raced.

The redcoats yelled and kicked their horses and spurred them.

They did their best to overtake the fugitives.

When they reached the point where the road narrowed to pathway, the officer in command of the dragoons called out:

"Come on, men! Doubtless we will run them into a place that there is no getting out of. Come on!"

He was in the lead.

He waved his sword and then belabored the poor horse with the flat side of the weapon.

The other troopers did likewise.

Onward still they raced.

Dick and Bob were somewhat fearful that they might be running into a trap.

They could not turn back, however, nor did the timber on either side of the pathway seem very inviting.

Dick was determined to keep on as long as possible, however.

In doing so he was doing better than he knew.

Suddenly the youths dashed out into a little dell, across which ran a little brook.

In the centre of the little dell, right by the brookside, was an encampment.

Seated about roaring campfires were perhaps a hundred roughly dressed men.

A little ways off to one side horses were grazing, there being some grass here, even in the winter time.

As the youths rode into the little dell at a fierce gallop, the men, who had been lounging about the fires, leaped to their feet.

The instant Dick's eyes fell upon this crowd of non-descript-looking men, a cry of joy escaped him.

"It is Marion, the 'Swamp Fox,' Bob, and his brave men! We are safe now!"

Dick and Bob were both well-acquainted with the Swamp Fox.

They had carried more than one message to him from General Greene during the past winter.

Marion recognized Dick and Bob almost as soon as they recognized him.

It was not more than fifty yards from the point where the youths had emerged from the timber to where the Swamp Fox's men were, and the youths were there very quickly.

They reined up their horses with a jerk that set them back on their haunches.

They leaped to the ground.

"Quick! Tell the men to make ready, General Marion!"

cried Dick. "We are pursued by a band of British dragoons. They are almost upon us!"

General Marion gave a sharp, quick order to his men.

They sank upon one knee, each and every man of them, and resting their muskets on the other knee, waited quietly and calmly for the appearance of the British dragoons.

They had not long to wait.

They had not much more than got into position before out into the little dell dashed the redcoats!

CHAPTER V.

BESET BY TORIES.

The instant the British officer saw the men kneeling there, within easy musket range, with their muskets leveled, he reined up his horse with a jerk and shouted a command to his men.

They reined up their horses, also.

But they were too late.

Crash!

The Swamp Fox's men had fired a volley.

A death-dealing volley it was, too.

Good shots were these hardy rangers.

A score of saddles were emptied at this one fire!

This was too much for the rest.

They whirled their horses and galloped back into the protecting forest with all speed.

That was all there was of the encounter.

It was over almost before it begun.

In an instant twenty of the redcoats had been laid low.

Not all had been killed, of course.

Six were killed, the others more or less severely wounded.

The Swamp Fox now stepped forward and shook hands with the youth.

"Well, well; this is indeed a surprise!" he said. "Where did you boys come from?"

Dick told him.

He also related the story of how they came to be chased by the band of British dragoons.

"It is lucky you happened upon us," the Swamp Fox said, when Dick had finished; "otherwise they might have captured you."

"Well, we would have given them a big chase, first," said Bob.

"Yes, indeed," agreed Dick. "We were pulling away from them."

The Swamp Fox's men now went and took a look at the redcoats who had been knocked off their horses by the bullets out of the muskets.

The six who had been killed were buried.

The wounded ones were given such assistance as was possible, under the circumstances, as General Marion was as humane as he was brave.

"You boys had better wait till nightfall before venturing into Hillsboro, I think," the Swamp Fox said; "some of those fellows who were in the crowd you were with would recognize you, if you went into the town in daylight."

"True," agreed Dick; "we will wait till night."

The Swamp Fox put out pickets.

Now that the British knew where the patriots were, they might attempt to slip back and attack them unawares.

Nothing of the kind happened, however.

Evidently the redcoats had had all they wanted.

The one volley had been sufficient.

Dick and Bob remained till after supper, and then, mounting their horses, bade good-by to Marion and his men and rode away.

They followed the path they had traversed in coming.

When the path opened up into the road they followed it back to where it joined the main road.

Turning into the main road they rode onward in the direction of Hillsboro.

They rode onward for perhaps an hour.

It was quite dark, and not being sure of their way, they stopped in front of a house to make inquiries.

Dick leaped down and knocked on the door.

There was no reply, nor indeed any sound from within.

Dick knocked again.

Still no reply.

Dick waited a few moments and then knocked a third time, this time quite loudly.

A few moments later he heard sounds within.

Footsteps approached the door.

And a voice called out:

"Who is there?"

"Friends," replied Dick.

"Friends, you say?"

"Yes."

"What do you want?"

"I wish to ask you a few questions."

"Well, go ahead and ask them."

"Open the door and I will."

"I won't do it," was the prompt reply.

"You won't?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"For a very good reason."

"Name it."

"I can do that; you needn't think you can fool me, you blamed old Tory. I've been expecting you and your gang for an hour, and if you get this door open you'll have to break it down, that's all!"

Dick was surprised.

He began to understand matters.

The inmates of this house were patriots.

They were evidently expecting an attack from Tories.

This excited Dick's interest.

Dick was a generous-hearted youth.

He was all ready to lend assistance where assistance was needed.

He jumped to the conclusion that this family would need help.

"So you're a patriot, are you?" Dick asked.

"Yes, I am!" was the defiant reply. "You know it well."

"I didn't know it," replied Dick; "but I am glad to learn that such is the case. I am a patriot myself."

"You say you're a patriot?"

The tone was questioning, doubting.

"Yes, I am a patriot. Open the door; I wish to talk to you."

There were a few moments of silence.

Then Dick heard the sound of a bar being removed.

Then the door opened slowly.

In a huge fireplace at the opposite side of the room a brisk fire was burning.

The person who had opened the door was plainly outlined against the background of light made by the fire.

Dick was surprised to see that the person in question was a youth of about eighteen years of age.

As Dick stood facing the youth, his face was plainly visible in the firelight and it was easy for the youth to see that Dick was a stranger to him.

"Who are you?" the youth asked.

"Who am I?"

"Yes, who are you? I don't think I ever saw you before."

"I don't suppose you ever did see me before," replied Dick.

"I'm sure I never did; you don't live in these parts."

"You're right; I live a thousand miles from here."

"A thousand miles!"

"Yes."

"Who are you, and what are you doing here?"

"I am a patriot like yourself."

"So you said; but your name?"

"My name is Slater, Dick Slater."

"What!" exclaimed the youth; "Dick Slater, the patriot scout and spy, and captain of the 'Liberty Boys of '76?'"

"The same," replied Dick, with a smile. "But how happens it that you heard about me?"

"Some of General Wayne's men were here the other day," was the reply, "and I heard them talking about you."

"Oh, that's it?"

"Yes."

"Well, now that you know who I am," said Dick, "tell me who you are."

"My name is Tom Winters."

"Tom Winters, eh? Well, Tom, do you live here all alone? I don't see any one else around."

"No; I live here with my mother and sister. They are up in the loft. They went up there when they thought the Tories were coming."

"Oh, that's it?"

"Yes."

"What made you think there were Tories coming?"

"Because they have been threatening it for a long time; and now that Cornwallis has come back and taken up his quarters at Hillsboro with his army, the Tories around here are worse, ten times over, than they were before. I have been expecting some of them to come and attack us, as one of the scoundrels threatened me this morning. He said that all the Whigs would be killed or driven out of North Carolina in less than a month, and that unless I changed, and declared myself to be loyal to the king, they would burn our house down and drive us out."

"The scoundrel!" exclaimed Dick. "Have you no father?"

"Not now; he was with General Marion, and was killed."

The youth's voice took on a sad tone.

"Too bad!" said Dick, sympathetically. "I know how to sympathize with you, Tom. My own father was killed by the Tories right at the very beginning of the war. That is really what caused me to join the patriot army."

"I heard Marion's men say something about that. It is terrible, isn't it, the way the Tories have acted during the war?"

"Yes, indeed; they are, as a rule, worse than the British."

"So they are; and——"

"Listen!" interrupted Dick.

They listened for a few moments, and then Tom said:

"I hear the sound of horses' hoofbeats!"

"So do I," replied Dick.

"It must be the Tories coming to burn our house down!" said Tom, in an excited voice.

"Do you think so?"

"That Tory said they would pay me a visit soon, and give me a chance to take the oath of allegiance to the king."

"I judge you would not do that?"

"I would die first!"

There was no mistaking the earnestness of the youth.

He meant every word he uttered.

"Good! You are made of the right kind of material," said Dick; "and now I'll tell you what we will do: My companion here, Bob Estabrook, and I will conceal our horses in the edge of the timber, back of the house, and then come in the house and render you all the aid possible. I think we may be able to astonish your Tory friends a bit."

"Oh, thank you! thank you!" the youth said. "I would not let you endanger your own lives for me alone, but for the sake of my mother and sister, I accept your offer, gladly."

Dick ran to where Bob sat, and, grabbing the halter-strap, led his horse around behind the house and into the timber, which came up close.

It was not necessary to say anything to Bob.

He had heard Dick's conversation with the youth, and knew what was to be done.

He had followed Dick without a word.

He leaped down, and both youths tied their horses.

Then they hastened back to the house.

The hoofbeats of the horses sounded quite plainly now.

The horsemen, whoever they were, were close at hand.

"Come on!" invited Tom.

Dick and Bob stepped through the doorway.

Tom closed the door at once.

He placed the bar in place.

As he did so, he drew a breath of relief.

Then he turned, and, indicating a woman and a girl of about sixteen years, who stood near, said:

"My mother and sister; I have told them who you are."

The woman stepped forward and shook hands with the youths, greeting them pleasantly, while the girl bowed and looked confused.

There was not much time for ceremony, however.

The hoofbeats sounded close at hand—could be plainly heard even now, though the listeners were inside the house.

"Perhaps it would be better for the ladies to return to the loft, Tom," said Dick.

"Maybe it will be best," was the reply.

The mother and daughter thereupon returned to the loft.

"I think you had better go up there, too, Bob," said

Dick; "you will be likely to find some cracks between the logs, through which you may fire if trouble begins. I'll stay down here with Tom."

"All right, Dick;" and Bob went up into the loft.

There was a window in front, as well as a door.

Tom told Dick there was a crack underneath the window-ledge, through which he could look.

Dick took up his position there.

It was pretty dark out, but not so dark but that he could see a dark body advancing toward the house.

Dick knew the dark body was made up of a number of horsemen.

It came to a stop in front of the cabin.

There was a delay of a few moments, and then came the sound of footsteps.

Dick, straining his eyes, was enabled to make out the body of a man.

The man advanced straight toward the house and passed out of the range of Dick's vision.

Then there came a loud knock on the door.

Tom did not answer the knock.

He maintained absolute silence.

Dick thought it well to let the youth use his own judgment in the matter.

He was quite favorably impressed with Tom Winters.

He seemed to be an unusually bright youth.

Rap! rap! rap!

Again the knock.

Still Tom maintained silence.

He did not know that it would do any good to delay, but did not think it could do any harm.

There was a short interval of silence.

Then an impatient exclamation, followed by another:

Rap! rap! rap!

Tom saw it was useless to try to ignore the man, whoever he might be, so he called out:

"Who is there?"

"You know who is here!" was the reply in a gruff voice.

"It is Sam McPurdy."

"Oh, it's you, is it?"

"Yes."

"Well, what do you want?"

"I want you to open the door."

"What for?"

"What for? Because I say so!"

"Oh, because you say so, eh?"

"Yes."

"Since when did you become my boss?"

"Since this mornin'."

"You'll find you are mistaken, Sam McPurdy!" cried Tom, in an angry tone of voice; "you are not my boss, and never will be!"

"Won't I?"

There was a sneer in the man's voice.

"You won't!"

"Well, we'll see about that. Open the door!"

"I won't do it!"

"You'll wish you had!"

"I don't think so. But why do you wish me to open the door?"

"I want to talk to you?"

"What about?"

"You know."

"No, I don't know."

"Yes, you do. You know what I was talkin' to you about this mornin'."

"Yes, I know that."

"Well, that's what I want to talk to you about now."

"But I don't care to have any more to say on the subject."

"I do; and I'm goin' to say it, too! Open the door!"

"I don't think I will."

"I know you will! If you don't, we'll break it down!"

"Who are 'we'?"

"Oh, some of our neighbors. Open the door! You are to take the oath of allegiance to the good King George!"

"I am, eh?"

There was superb scorn in the ringing voice of the youth.

"You are!"

"You are badly mistaken, Sam McPurdy; I shall never take an oath of allegiance to King George, or any other king! I am a patriot, and expect to see our country free, our people independent. Nor is your King George good, either; he's a tyrant!"

"What's that? You insolent young rebel! We'll make you talk different as soon as we get at you! Open the door or we will break it down!"

"You'll have to break it down if you get in!" was the defiant reply. "You may be sure I shall not open it."

Tom and Dick heard the fellow give vent to an exclamation of disappointment and anger.

"It'll be all the worse for you, you insolent young rebel!" the fellow cried.

Then he called to his companions.

"Come here, boys! Come on, and help me break this door down!"

Immediately the trampling of many feet were heard.

CHAPTER VI.

DICK'S RUSE.

Dick had been watching closely through the crack between the logs.

He saw the dark forms approaching, and was sure there were fifteen or twenty of the scoundrels.

"Jove! that is too many for us to fight off," he thought; "what shall we do?"

It did not take him long to decide that strategy would have to be used.

He was fearful that even with the aid of strategy they might not succeed in driving the fellows away.

He decided to try the plan of putting on a bold front, first.

He thought he might succeed in scaring the Tories away.

He walked across to where Tom stood in front of the door.

"I'll talk to them a minute," he said.

"All right," said Tom.

"Hello, out there!" called Dick, in a loud, peremptory tone of voice.

"Hello, yourself!" was the reply. "Who are you?"

The speaker had detected the fact that it was not Tom's voice.

"It doesn't matter who I am. Suffice it to say I am one who will not permit you to put your plans in operation."

"I'd like to know how you are going to help yourself. There are twenty of us out here, and you are only——"

"There are fifteen of us in here! I think that is sufficient to enable us to defeat you and your plans."

"Fifteen of you? I don't believe it!"

"It doesn't matter to us whether you believe it or not. We will soon prove it to you if you do not go away and attend to your own business!"

Immediately the youth heard a murmuring of voices.

This was kept up for nearly a minute.

"They are discussing the matter," whispered Dick; "I hope they will decide to go on about their business. It would save us considerable trouble."

"So do I," was the reply; "but I would like to get one shot at that scoundrel, McPurdy!"

Presently the murmur of the voices ceased.

Then in a loud voice one of the fellows called out:

"We have you at our mercy, an' we call on you to come out and surrender!"

The fellow's tone was confident.

There was even a triumphant ring to it.

Dick hardly knew what to think.

"You have us at your mercy?" he asked, to draw the fellow out.

"We have!"

"How do you make that out? How can it be possible that you have us at your mercy?"

"It's easy enough."

"I don't understand how it can be so. We are almost as many as there are of you, and we are practically in a fort. We can fire upon you with deadly effect, while you cannot hurt us to speak of."

"Oh, we shan't enter into a battle with you."

"No?"

"No."

"Then what do you purpose doing?"

Dick's voice was calm and self-contained, but at the same time that he asked the question, a terrible thought had come to him.

He believed he understood what the man had reference to. A fiendish laugh came from the man outside.

It was echoed by his companions.

"What do we intend doin'?"

"Yes."

"That is easy enough to tell you: We are going to set the house on fire and burn it down over your heads unless you come out and surrender!"

It was out!

This was what Dick had feared.

It was what he had expected to hear the man say.

It gave him a chill at the heart.

Tom gave a gasp of terror and anger commingled.

"The scoundrels!—the—the—fiends!" he exclaimed, in a low tone, intense with feeling.

"That is just what they are, Tom," said Dick, in a grim tone. "Those Tories are worse than the redcoats."

Dick knew that he must make some reply to the words of the Tory.

It would not do to let him think they had frightened the inmates of the cabin.

"That is what I supposed you would say," replied Dick, in a voice of scorn; "that is just what might be expected from a gang of cut-throats and cowards!"

"What's that! Do you dare call us cut-throats and cowards?"

The Tory almost choked with rage.

"That is just what I do dare say—though it doesn't take much daring to talk thus to such cowards as you fellows will prove yourselves to be, if you put your threat into execution!"

"Well, we'll put it into execution, you may bet! If you will come out and surrender, it will be all right; but if you refuse, we will set the cabin on fire!"

"Well, I can tell you one thing," said Dick, in a tone which, in its seeming calmness, was greatly at variance with his feelings, "if you intend to roast us out, you will have to do it very quickly, for we have another party of men coming, and they are likely to reach here at any moment."

"Bosh! I don't believe it."

"You don't believe it, eh?"

"No, I don't."

"Well, you will believe it presently."

"Bah! that is all bravado—a story intended to frighten us."

"Very well; think so, if you will. You will soon learn your mistake."

"Bosh! Are you going to come out and surrender?"

Now, while talking, Dick had been doing some rapid thinking.

He realized that himself and companions were in serious danger.

The Tories outside were capable of doing what they had threatened.

Dick knew this.

He had no intention of marching out and surrendering. Consequently they were in a tight place.

Something would have to be done.

And at once.

When Dick told the fellow there was another party to come, a thought struck him.

If there was any way to get out of the cabin besides the front door, he might be able to work the plan which he had in mind.

"Tom," he whispered, "is there any other way of getting out of the house save by the front doorway?"

"There's a back window," was the cautious reply.

"Good!"

Then Dick raised his voice:

"Wait five minutes," he called out; "I will have a conference with the rest of the men and see what they say about it. If they say surrender, then we will do so; otherwise, not."

"All right," was the reply; "talk to them about it. Hurry, though, for we haven't any time to waste."

"In a hurry to go on and burn the houses down over the heads of a few more patriots, I suppose?" remarked Dick, scathingly.

"Well, yes; that's about it, I think."

The fellow's voice had a satisfied ring.

"I'd like to get a good lick at him with the butt of a musket," said Tom, in a low, fierce tone.

"Wait; we'll fix him before very long," said Dick, and then he went to the ladder and called to Bob to come down. Bob hastened down out of the loft.

"What is it, Dick?" he asked, in a whisper. "What do you want?"

"We must get out of the house, through the back window, Bob, and see if we can scare those scoundrels away."

"All right; I'm ready to try it."

"Come on," said Dick.

They made their way across to the farther side of the room.

There was a window there.

It swung inward on hinges.

When Dick had opened it he found that there was a heavy wooden shutter which was closed.

He pushed this open.

He was careful, and opened it slowly.

There might be some of the Tories around at the rear of the house.

He looked out.

It was quite dark, but had there been some of the Tories near he could have seen them.

Dick decided that the fellows had not thought to come around to the rear.

They had doubtless been so confident that the inmates of the cabin would come forth and surrender that they did not deem it worth while surrounding the house.

Dick climbed cautiously through the window.

As soon as he was through, Bob followed.

Dick pushed the wooden shutter shut.

Then he stole away toward the timber.

Bob stole after his comrade.

Fortunately it was only a few paces to the timber.

The youths were soon within the shelter of the trees.

Their horses were not far distant.

The youths soon reached the spot where the animals were tied.

They untied the halter-straps and led the horses away through the timber.

The youths moved slowly and carefully.

They did not wish the Tories to hear them.

They made a circuit, or half-circuit, rather, through the timber and came out into the road at a point perhaps two hundred yards from the house.

The youths knew that they had no time to spare.

The Tories might become impatient at any moment and put their threat of setting the cabin on fire into effect.

"Now, Bob," said Dick, "we must play the old trick of making them think a small army is coming. You know what is required—we must make noise enough for twenty men."

"I know, Dick. I'll make all the noise I can."

"Good! Do so. Are you ready?"

"Ready, Dick."

"All right; forward, then!"

The youths spurred their horses forward.

The animals leaped into a gallop at once.

They raced up the road, their hoofbeats thundering on the ground.

As they drew near the cabin, Dick and Bob set up a terrible yell.

It was really enough to frighten almost any one, the noise the youths made.

Then, as they came close up to the front of the cabin where the Tories had been, the youths drew their pistols and fired four shots.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PATRIOT PRISONER.

One would have thought the Tories would have been able to detect the fact that there were not more than two or three horsemen coming, and that the number of shots fired were very few for a body of men to fire.

The Tories, however, did not detect this.

They had more than half-believed Dick when he said there were fifteen men inside the cabin, and also that there were more men coming.

The result was that when they heard the hoofbeats of the youths' horses they thought a party of soldiers were coming.

They did not wait to listen closely.

They thought that if anybody was coming it would be a goodly sized party.

So, very far from being brave men, the Tories had turned and ridden away at full speed as soon as they heard Dick and Bob coming.

And when the youths fired the pistol shots it simply had the effect of causing the valiant would-be house-burners to lash their horses to still greater speed.

Dick and Bob paused in front of the cabin and listened.

The thunder of the hoofbeats of the Tories' flying horses could be plainly heard.

The youths laughed in a tone of satisfaction.

"Well, we frightened them away, Bob," said Dick.

"I should say so, Dick!" with a chuckle. "Say, they must be going. Just listen to the thunder of their horses' hoofbeats!"

"They are getting away with all possible speed, Bob."

"They are, for a fact. Say, do you suppose they will come back again?"

"I hardly think so."

"They are too badly scared, eh?"

"I think so."

"I judge you are right; they would be afraid that we were still here."

"Yes."

The cabin door now opened and Tom appeared.

"You scared the scoundrels away, didn't you?" he exclaimed. "Hurrah!"

"They are gone, at any rate," replied Dick.

"I don't think they will bother you again very soon," said Bob.

"I hope not. Say, I don't know what we should have done had you two not been here."

"It might have turned out bad for you, that is a fact," admitted Dick. "Those Tories are mean-hearted fellows, and will stop at nothing."

"Well, if they try to bother me, some of them will get hurt, anyway!" said Tom, determinedly.

"They may not bother you again at all," said Bob. "They are such arrant cowards that they will be afraid you would have help at hand, as you did to-night. They won't know that it was just an accident this time."

"I hope it will turn out that way," said Tom.

"Well, we must be going," said Dick; "we are on our way to Hillsboro. Will you direct us which way to go, Tom?"

"I should say so! I wish I could do more in return for what you have done for my mother, sister and myself."

"That is all right, Tom. We are always glad to be of aid to patriots. The knowledge that we have done our duty is sufficient pay for what we have done."

Then Tom directed the youths how to go in order to reach Hillsboro.

Before starting they went indoors, while Tom held their horses, and bade good-by to Tom's mother and sister.

Mrs. Winters and her daughter thanked the youths earnestly for what they had done, and Dick told them that he and Bob had simply done their duty, nothing more.

Then bidding the two good-by, Dick and Bob left the

cabin, mounted their horses, and, with a cheery "good-by" to Tom, rode away in the darkness.

The youths rode onward steadily for an hour.

They thought they must be near Hillsboro by that time.

They were right.

They reached the suburbs of the town twenty minutes later.

They did not enter.

It was not their intention to ride into the place.

This would attract too much attention.

It would at once stamp them as having come a distance.

They did not wish to attract attention at all.

To this end they decided to leave their horses outside the town.

They would then enter on foot.

If there were sentinels out they would thus be enabled to slip past them by climbing fences and cutting across lots.

On horseback they would have had to keep in the road, and could not have gotten past without being challenged.

They rode back a distance of perhaps a quarter of a mile.

They entered a clump of timber.

They dismounted.

Then they led the horses into the timber.

They penetrated a distance of a hundred yards or so.

Then they tied the horses to trees.

This done, they made their way out of the clump of timber.

They walked back in the direction of the town.

They were soon at the outskirts.

"We will have to be careful, now, Bob," said Dick. "I think we had better take to the lots. The sentinels are doubtless posted on the roads."

"I judge so, Dick."

The youths climbed a fence and made their way across a lot.

Reaching the farther side, they climbed another fence.

They crossed a narrow alley, climbed another fence and continued on across the adjoining lot.

They kept up these tactics until well within the town.

Presently they emerged upon a street and walked boldly down it.

Dick was sure they had passed the sentinels.

They would be in no particular danger now, he was sure, and might as well be bold in their movements.

They were in the residence portion of the town as yet.

They kept on.

Presently they reached the business portion.

It was about ten o'clock, but the majority of the business houses were still open.

This was due to the presence of the British soldiers in the town.

The business men were quite willing to keep their stores open in order to get a chance to secure some of the British gold which the soldiers were more than willing to spend for liquors and tobacco, as well as for clothing, shoes, underwear and other things.

The merchants of Hillsboro had never had such a market.

They might never have such a market again.

This one might not last long.

So it was merely good business judgment to make the most of it while they did have it.

And this was what they were doing.

Things were lively in the business portion of the town.

British soldiers were here, there and everywhere.

Many of them were drunk, and all were enjoying themselves, each after his own fashion.

There was much talk.

The redcoats were boasting of what they had done.

Dick and Bob paused occasionally and listened.

The redcoats declared that they had "beaten the rebels."

They said they had driven the "rebels" out of North Carolina.

They declared that they would soon go up into Virginia and drive the "rebels" out of that State.

They were very boastful.

Especially was this the case with those who had been drinking more than was good for them.

It made Dick's and Bob's blood boil to listen to the fellows.

They had hard work containing themselves at times.

They could hardly resist the temptation to tell the redcoats what they thought of them.

This would not have done, however.

It would have been suicidal.

The youths were there in the British lines.

They were there as spies.

They had come to secure information.

They wished to secure all the information possible.

In order to secure it, it was absolutely necessary that their presence should not be suspected.

They were well aware of this.

They were old hands at this business.

They were skilled in keeping control of themselves, also.

So although sorely tried at times, they managed to keep still and listen to the boasts of the redcoats without making a word of reply.

Then, too, there were recompenses.

They succeeded in picking up many little items of information.

They learned that the Tories were rallying to the British standard.

The redcoats said that in a couple of weeks the British army would be twice as large as it now was.

The youths were standing, listening to a group of redcoats, who were talking loudly and boasting of what they had done, and of what they would do later on when suddenly there was an outcry as some men came riding down the street.

"A prisoner! A rebel prisoner!" was the cry.

"A spy!"

"Hang him!"

"That's it—that's the talk!"

"Hang the spy!"

Dick and Bob were interested now, for sure.

There were lights enough in the building on each side of the street and thrown out by the street lamps so that it was possible to see first rate.

A body of horsemen were riding down the street.

They were redcoats.

In their midst was a man **who** was evidently a prisoner.

He was dressed in a rough, ragged suit of citizen's clothing.

As the party drew near, Dick and Bob forced their way through the crowd.

They wished to get as close as possible to the party as it passed.

They wished to see if they could recognize the prisoner.

Then, too, if they could do so they wished to let the poor fellow know he had friends in the town.

This would be a difficult thing to do, however, unless the prisoner should prove to be some one whom they knew and who knew them.

They looked at the prisoner, eagerly, searchingly, as the party drew near.

Presently they got a good look at his face.

They recognized him.

The man was one of General Marion's officers.

He was one who had done much good work in the way of spying and learning the plans of the British.

He knew Dick and Bob well.

He had been at the camp of the Swamp Fox when they left there that evening.

The youths wondered how he happened to get captured.

Doubtless he had started out on a scouting and spying expedition and had been taken by surprise by the redcoats.

The prisoner was a brave man.

He sat his horse erect and dignified.

He looked about him upon the faces of the shouting redcoats with a look of scorn, contempt and defiance on his face.

The cries of "Hang the spy!" did not seem to daunt him or frighten him in the least.

At times even a smile—a smile of scorn—appeared on his face.

If the redcoats thought to frighten him they soon realized that they could not do so.

Dick and Bob pushed their hats back and held their heads up so as to get the prisoner to see their face, if possible.

If he should see them he would know he had friends near at hand and would no doubt feel better.

The prisoner's eyes roved here and there, from face to face.

Suddenly his eyes fell upon the faces of Dick and Bob.

Many men in his situation would have given a start; would perhaps have betrayed to the onlookers the fact that he had seen and recognized some one.

Not so this man, however.

He recognized the youths, without doubt.

He looked them straight in the eyes and gave a scarcely perceptible nod.

The nod said, as plainly as words could have said:

"I see and recognize you!"

But he gave no sign that could have been discerned by eyes other than those of Dick and Bob.

The crowd followed the party with the prisoner.

The crowd grew larger as it moved along.

The redcoats shouted and yelled for the "rebel" spy to be hung.

"Let's take him and hang him!" suddenly shouted one vociferous fellow. "Come on, fellows! Let's hang the spy!"

He made a rush toward the party, in the midst of which was the prisoner, as he spoke.

Perhaps half the redcoats present in the crowd were either drunk or well along on the road.

Their blood was heated, their minds inflamed.

They were in just the condition for anything of this kind.

All they needed was a leader.

And here was a leader.

Instantly two-score of the redcoats surged forward, close upon the heels of the leader.

"We're with you!" was the cry. "We'll take the rebel spy out and hang him!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PATRIOT'S DANGER.

Still others joined in the demonstration.

The party having the prisoner in charge tried to get the fellows to listen to reason.

All to no purpose.

The half-crazed men were not in a condition to be reasoned with.

They kept yelling, "Hang the rebel spy!" and drowned the voices of the men on horseback.

Seeing they could not do any good by remonstrating, the men tried to urge their horses forward and escape the rush of their excited comrades.

Here again they failed.

They found the horses' bits seized.

The horses were held.

The men in the saddles did their best to ride over the men, but could not.

The fellows held on with desperate energy.

Then the men on horseback drew their pistols and threatened to shoot.

This but angered the drink-crazed redcoats the more.

"What! shoot your comrades, to save the life of a cursed rebel spy!" they cried. "Just try it! Just do it! We dare you to fire!"

It was now an exciting scene.

Dick and Bob, as may well be supposed, were very much interested.

They watched affairs with the eyes of hawks.

Would the men who were crying out for the patriot's blood succeed in getting their wishes satisfied?

The youths, watching closely, thought that they would.

The members of the party demanding that the "rebel" be hung were mad and desperate from drinking too much liquor, and they outnumbered the men on horseback at least five to one.

Dick and Bob could not help noting the demeanor of the prisoner.

Although he was no doubt fully aware that his life was in great danger, he did not turn pale or look frightened.

His face still wore that peculiar, scornful smile.

He met the gaze of the angry redcoats unflinchingly.

The youths admired the man for his wonderful coolness and bravery.

Dick's mind was working rapidly.

He was trying to think of some way to save the life of the patriot.

He felt that the man's life was in grave danger.

The redcoats were angry enough, crazy enough to do what they threatened.

But how was he to save the prisoner's life?

It looked as if there was no possible chance of doing so.

Dick was a youth, however, who never despaired.

He believed there was some way it might be accomplished, if only he could think of it.

He kept on thinking.

Suddenly it came to him.

Dick knew that if Cornwallis, the British general, knew that there was a "rebel" prisoner in the town, he would not permit him to be hanged.

He would wish to question the patriot and see if he could learn something from him regarding the patriots and their plans.

If word could be gotten to General Cornwallis before the patriot was hung by the infuriated mob, the general would see to it that the deed was not committed.

Dick made up his mind that word should be gotten to General Cornwallis, if possible.

He plucked Bob by the coat-sleeve.

The two moved through the crowd till they were on its outskirts.

Dick looked around him.

There were many persons standing around, dressed in citizen's clothes, who were taking no part in the demonstration against the patriot prisoner.

Dick picked upon one rather intelligent-looking fellow, and, plucking him by the arm, said:

"It will be a big mistake to hang that fellow, don't you think?"

The man looked at Dick rather curiously and replied:

"Well, I don't know. He's a rebel spy. He will be hung, anyway, so as well one time as another."

"You are mistaken," said Dick; "General Cornwallis will be very angry when he learns that a rebel spy has been hung without his knowledge or orders, and without his having had an opportunity to pump the fellow to see if he could secure some valuable information from him."

"That's so; I never thought of that!" the man said.

"Well, I have thought of it. It will be the biggest kind of a mistake if the rebel is hung before General Cornwallis gets a chance to talk with him."

"I guess you are right."

"I know I am."

"Why don't you go and inform him of what is going on here, then?"

"I would, only I don't know where his headquarters are."

"You don't know where they are?"

The man seemed surprised.

"No," replied Dick; "I am a stranger in Hillsboro. I just got here a little while ago."

"Where from?"

"From fifty miles over to the northwestward."

"Why have you come here?"

"I came to join the British army."

"Then you are loyal to the king?"

"Yes, I'm a king's man."

"So am I."

"Are you going to join the army?"

"I think I shall do so."

"Then why don't you earn the good-will of the British general by going and informing him regarding what is going on here?"

The man looked interested.

"I hadn't thought of the matter," he said, in a moment;

"I believe it would be a good speculation, however."

"It certainly will bring you the favorable notice of the general, and that may mean rapid advancement."

"True, by Jove! I believe I will do it."

"Do so," urged Dick.

"I will!"

There was decision in the man's tone now.

"Hurry, then!" said Dick. "It will be bad if you are too late."

"I'll make it in time. It isn't far to headquarters."

"Don't let any grass grow under your feet."

"I won't."

"Hurry."

"I'm off!"

The man turned and hastened away.

As soon as he was clear of the crowd he broke into a run.

Dick and Bob, who were watching him, looked at each other with a look of satisfaction.

"I believe he'll make it in time, Bob."

"I think so."

"But in case he doesn't," added Dick, in a low tone, "we must be in readiness to try to do something to save the prisoner's life."

"But what can we do?"

"That is more than I can say. We will have to be guided by circumstances."

"You are right; well, lead the way and I will follow, and whatever you decide to do will be all right, and I will do my best to back you up in it and do all I can to help you out."

"All right, Bob."

Dick knew he could always count on Bob.

He made his way back through the crowd, elbowing people aside as he did so.

Bob kept close at his comrade's heels.

If anything happened he would be on hand to render aid.

While the youths had been away, talking to the man who had gone to warn General Cornwallis, the infuriated redcoats had made a rush and had pulled the prisoner down off his horse.

They had just started down the street, uttering cries of exultation and triumph.

Dick and Bob followed as closely as was possible.

They wondered where the redcoats could be headed for.

They soon learned.

Not more than fifty yards distant from where they had taken possession of the prisoner, the redcoats came to a stop beneath a large tree which stood near the edge of the sidewalk.

"Here's the place!" cried one of the redcoats who had hold of the prisoner; "here's just the place to string the rebel spy up! Somebody run to the nearest store and get a rope!"

"I'll go!" cried a fellow.

"All right; hurry!"

The man who had volunteered to get the rope hastened away.

He was back in an incredibly short space of time.

He brought a coil of rope with him.

"Rig a noose in it!" cried the redcoat who seemed to have taken the lead in the affair.

The fellow who had the rope proceeded to do as he had been ordered to do.

He was not an expert at this work.

He had some difficulty in rigging the noose.

Dick and Bob were glad of this.

They were glad of the delay.

Every minute would count now.

They kept a watch on what was going on here, and also up the street to see if the general was coming.

They hoped that General Cornwallis or one of the members of his staff would put in an appearance in time to put a stop to the hanging.

Presently the fellow who was tying the knot in the rope and rigging the noose succeeded in getting the work done to his satisfaction.

"There," he said, in a tone of relief, "I think that will do, all right."

He handed the noose end of the rope to the leader of the redcoats.

The fellow looked at the noose and nodded.

"That is all right," he said; "that is plenty good enough for the hanging of a rebel spy!"

Then he placed the noose over the prisoner's head.

"How do you like the feel of that?" he asked, ironically.

"Do you think it will make a becoming necktie?"

"You'll learn by experience how it feels, one of these days," was the cool reply; "you will wind up your career on the gallows or I'm no judge!"

"Curse you!" the redcoat cried, hotly; "we'll take that sauciness out of you in a very few minutes, now!"

As he spoke he pulled the rope taut and adjusted the knot under the prisoner's left ear.

"Here," he growled, handing the end of the rope to the man who had gone to the store and got the rope, "climb up and put the end of the rope over that limb!"

The fellow took the end of the rope, and, placing it in his mouth, began climbing the tree.

He was not a very good climber.

Hence his progress was slow.

Dick and Bob were glad of this.

They looked alternately at the redcoat and then up the street.

They hoped to see the general or one of his officers coming.

They began to fear that interference would come too late.

Dick made up his mind to take some desperate risks rather than stand there and see a fellow-patriot hung.

Still he hoped that he would not be forced to take a prominent part in the affair.

It would attract attention to himself, and this was what he did not wish to have done.

The redcoat finally managed to get up to the limb and get the end of the rope over it.

Then he took hold of the end of the rope and climbed back down.

"A dozen of you fellows take hold of the rope!" ordered the man who was acting as master of ceremonies. "Take hold, I say, and when I give the word, hoist the rebel spy into the air!"

A number of men leaped forward and seized hold of the rope.

Dick and Bob drew long breaths, and looked anxiously up the street.

Would General Cornwallis or his representative never come!

The youths began to fear he would come too late.

He was not yet in sight.

The master of ceremonies now turned to the prisoner.

"You don't deserve it, but if you have anything to say, any word which you wish delivered to any one, we will listen to you and will deliver your message, if it is possible to do so."

"I have nothing to say—no message for any one," was the calm reply.

The redcoat looked at the brave man standing there with the rope around his neck—standing, waiting for the word that would sound his death-knell, and then, after a moment, he said:

"It is a pity to hang so brave a man. You deserve a better death. If you will say, 'Long live the king!' we will shoot instead of hang you."

The prisoner threw up his head with a gesture of scorn. "Not to save my life would I say it!" was the reply in a prompt, ringing voice.

A curse escaped the lips of the redcoat.

"You wouldn't, eh?" he cried.

"I would not!"

"Not even to save your life, eh?"

"Not even to save my life!"

There was grim determination in the prisoner's tone.

All who heard him felt that he spoke the truth.

"All right; have it so, then. Up with him, men!" cried the redcoat.

He seemed to be enraged by the bravery of the prisoner.

Dick knew that something would have to be done.

A glance up the street showed him that no one was yet in sight.

General Cornwallis or a representative would certainly soon be on the ground, but unless something was done it would arrive too late.

Dick decided to make a desperate effort to stay the execution of the patriot until the arrival of the officer, if possible.

Instantly, and just as the men were beginning to pull up on the rope, the youth cried, in a clear, ringing voice:

"Hold! General Cornwallis is coming, and he wishes to have a talk with the prisoner before he is hanged. Hold! Pull him up at your peril!"

CHAPTER IX.

A BOLD SCHEME.

The men ceased pulling on the rope.

All looked in the direction from which the voice had come.

Dick was right in the midst of the crowd.

A few of those who stood almost beside him doubtless knew from whom it was that the words came, but the majority of those in the crowd did not know.

Dick was careful not to make any move to attract attention to him more than he had already done by calling out. He stood perfectly still.

The members of the crowd looked first to see who the speaker of the words was, and failing to single him out they turned and looked up the street to see if he had spoken the truth.

No one was in sight.

The redcoat who had constituted himself master of ceremonies looked to see if Dick had spoken truly, and, seeing no one coming, he made up his mind there was no truth in the words.

He became angry.

"Whoever spoke those words, just now, is a liar!" he cried; "and I doubt not he is a rebel and sympathizes with the prisoner. Some one please point the speaker out to me. Do this and I will point out to you a rebel!"

Dick decided that a bold course was as good a course as any.

He at once called out, loudly and clearly:

"You yourself is the liar, and I am not a rebel!"

"What's that! You dare to call me a liar?" the redcoat cried, in a rage. "I'll settle with you as soon as we have finished this affair!"

"Very well," replied Dick; "but I would advise you to go very slow and not finish this affair very quickly. When General Cornwallis comes and finds you have hanged this man without having given him a chance to talk with him, you will wish you had not been so hasty."

"Bosh! General Cornwallis is not coming. Up with the rebel spy, men!"

The men started to pull on the rope.

"Hold!" cried Dick. "You will be sorry if you hang this man before the general gets here. You had better wait a few minutes."

"Up with him!" roared the redcoat, who had all along acted as leader. "Up with the cursed rebel spy!"

The men obeyed the command this time.

Dick again called out for them to "Hold!" but this time they did not do so.

Slowly and steadily the prisoner was lifted.

His feet left the ground.

He hung writhing in the air.

Dick realized that if the poor fellow's life was to be saved something would have to be done instantly.

A thought came to him.

He drew one of his pistols and cocked it.

He leveled the weapon, took quick aim, and fired.

Then a wonderful thing happened:

The rope parted midway between the top of the prisoner's head and the limb, and the poor fellow dropped to the ground in a heap.

The men who had hold of the rope went sprawling to the ground, the sudden giving way of the rope having let them fall.

As might have been expected, the fellow who had constituted himself master of ceremonies, dodged and nearly fell down in trying to get back behind some of the people in the crowd when Dick fired the shot.

Like all such fellows, he was an arrant coward; and he had thought that Dick had fired at him.

When he saw what had happened, however, he was furious.

It was a marvelous shot which Dick had fired.

The bullet had partially severed the rope, causing it to snap in two.

The people who had seen the wonderful shot uttered cries of wonder.

There was a tone of admiration in the cries of many.

The tone of others, however, betrayed anger.

The majority of the redcoats in the crowd were, of course, in favor of the hanging of the rebel spy.

"What a wonderful shot!"

"Who did that?"

"He is a brave fellow!"

"He's a meddler!"

"He did right!"

"He ought to be hanged himself!"

Such was the tenor of the remarks, the people being seemingly about equally divided in sentiment.

The redcoat leader, having discovered that he had not been aimed at, and that he was unhurt, became quite bold.

"Seize the scoundrel who fired that shot!" he cried. "He is a rebel himself or a sympathizer, and an enemy to the king. Seize him, I say!"

It may be worthy of note to state that he made no movement toward putting his own orders into execution.

He left that for others to do.

A number of redcoats, who were near Dick, leaped forward.

They intended to grasp him and make a prisoner of him.

But they found they were likely to have their hands more than full in doing so.

The first two or three who came within reach of Dick were knocked down so promptly as to fill the spectators with wonder and amazement.

Cries of "Bravo, young fellow!" were heard from the citizen members of the crowd.

From the redcoat members came snarls and curses.

They were becoming worked up now.

A dozen rushed forward to attack Dick.

The youth met them bravely.

Bob was there, also, and took a hand.

Affairs were indeed lively there for a few moments.

Then there came the cry:

"The general! General Cornwallis is coming!"

This cry had the effect of causing the redcoats to pause in their attack on Dick and Bob.

The fact that the general was coming would seem to indicate that the two young fellows had known more than was suspected.

This frightened the redcoats who had been attacking the youths.

For aught they knew Dick and Bob might be confidential spies under the general, in which event all who had taken a hand against the two would come in for a severe reprimand or perhaps worse.

General Cornwallis, accompanied by several officers of his staff, was approaching.

"What does this mean?" he cried, in an angry tone, as he came near, the crowd having parted to let the little party approach closely. "What is going on here?"

The fellow who had taken the lead in everything, and had been strenuous in his efforts to have the patriot prisoner hung, was attempting to sneak away through the crowd, but the eyes of the general were upon him, and he called out for the soldier to stop.

"Let no one leave the spot until given permission to do so!" Cornwallis ordered. "I am going to probe this matter and see who is to blame for this work."

The prisoner, who had been pretty severely choked, but who was now sitting up, the rope still around his neck, now attracted the attention of General Cornwallis.

"Ah, here is the prisoner!" he exclaimed. "And he is still alive. Good! Take the rope from around his neck, some one!"

Half a dozen of the soldiers leaped to obey the command.

They were eager to redeem themselves, and try to get on the good side of the general.

In this way they hoped to avoid punishment for the hand they had taken in this affair.

They took the rope from around the prisoner's neck in a jiffy.

"Help the man to his feet!" ordered Cornwallis.

This was done.

"Now take the prisoner to the prison!"

The soldiers at once started away, with the prisoner in their midst.

Dick and Bob slipped out of the crowd and started after the party having the prisoner.

They did not wish to remain and be seen by Cornwallis, as he would be likely to recognize them.

And then they thought that it was possible that they might be able to rescue the prisoner before the prison was reached.

Quite a crowd followed the party, however—partially surrounding it, in fact—and the youths had no opportunity for making the attempt.

Dick and Bob kept with the crowd and followed the party into the prison court.

The door of the prison was opened and the soldiers disappeared within the building, taking the prisoner with them.

The crowd then filed out of the court and dispersed.

Dick and Bob passed out of the court with the rest, but they did not go away.

They paused just outside, and within the shadow of the high stone wall.

They were unwilling to leave the vicinity of the prison.

A patriot comrade was a prisoner within those walls, and they must rescue him if such a thing were possible.

This would be an extremely difficult thing to do, however.

The youths realized this.

While they were standing there discussing the situation they saw General Cornwallis and his staff officers approaching.

The youths drew still farther back, so as to avoid being seen.

When the little party reached the entrance to the prison court, General Cornwallis entered alone.

The others went on in the direction of headquarters.

"He's going to enter the prison and have a conversation with the prisoner," whispered Dick.

"Little good will it do him," said Bob.

"You are right, Bob; he will learn nothing that will be of benefit to him."

The youths stepped to the entrance into the court and looked after the general.

They saw him disappear through the doorway leading

into the prison, and then they resumed the discussion of the problem which confronted them.

"If we could only manage to get in there," said Dick, meditatively, "I think we would be all right, and that we could free the prisoner and make our own escape as well."

"I think so, Dick; but getting in there is the trouble."

"Yes, that is the difficulty."

The youths talked the matter over from every point of view.

They discussed it, pro and con.

They thought long and hard.

But they could think of no way in which it would be possible for them to gain entrance to the prison.

They remained there till General Cornwallis came forth and started toward headquarters.

As the general passed the youths they heard him say:

"He is a stubborn rascal, but I'll make him talk in the morning or know the reason why!"

Bob nudged Dick, and when the British commander had gotten out of hearing, said:

"He didn't learn anything, eh, Dick?"

"I knew he would not," was the reply.

The youths were unable to decide upon a course of action, so they presently moved away down the street.

They remained on the streets listening to the talk of the redcoats, and picking up all the information possible, until nearly midnight; and then they went to a tavern and secured a room for the night.

It seemed to Bob as if he had scarcely more than gotten asleep when he was awakened by Dick.

"I've got a scheme for entering the prison, Bob!" Dick said.

"What is your scheme, Dick?"

"I'll tell you: We'll go to the jail and tell the jailer we have been sent by General Cornwallis; that we are to be treated as though we were prisoners and placed in the room with the prisoner captured last night, in order that we may learn something regarding the movements of the patriot army; do you understand?"

"Yes, but how will that do the prisoner any good?"

"I'll tell you: We'll take a rope along, hidden under my coat. We will assist the prisoner to make his escape by way of the window, and then we will go back down and walk out through the front doorway and get out of this town in a hurry."

"We can try it," said Bob, who was always ready to follow Dick's lead.

They at once left the tavern.

They went to a store which was open thus early—it being

now just daylight—and bought about thirty feet of small but stout rope.

This rope Dick coiled around his waist underneath his coat as soon as they left the store.

Then they made their way in the direction of the prison.

They were soon there.

They entered the courtyard and approached the front door of the prison.

Dick pounded on the door loudly and boldly.

He waited a few moments and then pounded again.

Presently the door swung open and a man appeared in the doorway.

"Who are you?" he asked.

Dick saw that the man, who was evidently the turnkey, was eyeing himself and comrade closely.

The youth realized that he would have to be careful if he did not wish to be found out.

"General Cornwallis sent us here," replied Dick, promptly, and with every appearance of candor and frankness; "he was here to see the prisoner last night and the fellow refused to tell him anything regarding the intended movements of the rebel army, so the general told us to come here and tell you to pretend that we were prisoners who have just been captured. He said for you to put us into the same cell with the prisoner, and we are going to try to secure some information from him."

"Where is the order from the general?" asked the turnkey.

"He did not write one; he said that it would be sufficient for us to tell you we came from him."

Dick was afraid this would not be sufficient, but he hoped it would be.

The turnkey seemed doubtful.

He looked at the youths with keen, searching eyes.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"We are king's men who have just recently come here. We have joined the army, and General Cornwallis sent us to do this work for the reason that he knew it would be easier for us to make the prisoner believe we were rebels, and prisoners, than it would be for some of the regular soldiers to do it."

"True," the turnkey admitted; "well, I will do as the general said for me to do. Come in."

The youths stepped across the threshold, and the great door swung shut with a dull clang.

They were inside the prison!

Would they succeed in freeing the patriot prisoner?

Would they succeed in getting out and away again in safety?"

CHAPTER X.

AT BAY.

These were questions which flashed through the youths' mind.

Of course, there was no knowing what the answers to the questions might be.

The youths would have to go ahead and see how affairs worked out.

"Follow me," said the turnkey.

The youths did so.

The turnkey led the way along the hallway, up a pair of stairs and then along another hall.

Presently he paused in front of the last door.

"This is the room," he said.

He unlocked the door.

Then he turned to Dick and Bob.

"In with you!" he said in an imperative tone. "You will find another rebel in there and you can talk your troubles over, and all be miserable together.

The youths entered the room and were barely through the doorway when the door went shut with a clang.

Dick made a sign to the inmate of the room to maintain silence, and then placing his ear close to the keyhole of the door listened.

He heard the footsteps of the turnkey as he walked away.

When sure that the jailer was gone, Dick turned to the patriot prisoner.

"Well, Mr. Clancy, how are you?" greeted Dick.

"In pretty bad shape now, Dick," was the reply, as he shook hands with the youths. "But how comes it you two are here?"

Dick told him in as few words as possible.

"There is no time to lose," he said, in conclusion; "if you escape, it must be at once. Let us get to work."

Dick went to the window and raised it cautiously.

There was no one in sight.

The window overlooked the street, not the prison court.

"You can escape, I think," Dick said, eagerly.

Then he unwrapped the rope from around his waist, and, tying the end of the rope to the leg of the iron cot, he threw the other end out of the window.

"Now, down with you, as quickly as possible!" said Dick. "And don't wait for us when you get down. Get away as fast as you can. We will go out the way we came in."

The man thanked the youths earnestly, and then quickly climbed through the window and slid down the rope.

Dick and Bob watched till they saw their friend had gotten safely to the ground and away, and then they pulled up the rope.

They listened, expecting to hear the alarm raised, but they were agreeably disappointed.

No alarm was sounded.

Clancy, the patriot, had succeeded in getting away without attracting attention.

Dick and Bob now sat down to await the return of the turnkey.

He had told them that he would return in one hour.

He would quietly unlock the door and then the youths could quickly open the door, step out into the hall, lock the door again and go back downstairs with him.

This plan was carried out.

An hour had passed—it seemed longer to the youths—when they heard footsteps approaching along the hall.

Then the footsteps ceased and there was a slight rattle at the lock of the door.

Then the footsteps were heard going away again.

Dick took hold of the knob and opened the door.

Both youths stepped through.

Dick closed the door and locked it.

Then they walked quickly down the hallway and caught up with the turnkey.

"Did you learn anything of the prisoner?" asked the jailer, as Dick handed him the keys.

"Not very much," replied Dick; "he seemed to be suspicious of us."

"He did?"

"Yes."

"I thought he looked like a pretty shrewd sort of fellow."

"He certainly is."

They were soon at the end of the hallway, and made their way downstairs.

They walked along this hallway to the front door, which the turnkey opened.

Dick and Bob stepped through the doorway and started to walk away when they heard a commanding voice cry out:

"Hold! Stand where you are!"

They whirled—to find themselves standing face to face with General Cornwallis!

In one hand the general held his sword, in the other a whistle.

"Dick Slater and Bob Estabrook, rebel spies, I have you at last!" the British officer said, in an exultant tone.

Then he placed the whistle to his lips and blew a shrill blast.

Instantly from both the right and left-hand sides, through entrances into the prison court, a score of armed redcoats came rushing forward.

Dick and Bob stood at bay.

They were taken by surprise.

They had not expected anything of this kind.

But they were not the youths to give up tamely.

To be captured would be to be put to death.

They were the most noted spies in the patriot army.

The company of "Liberty Boys" had done more to aid the cause of Liberty and to injure the redcoats' chances for success in America than any entire regiment.

The result would be that they would be hung or shot at once.

The youths realized this.

They would rather die fighting than to submit to capture.

Even as the redcoats came rushing toward the youths a thought came to them.

At the same instant each drew a pistol.

As one person, they leaped toward General Cornwallis.

Each youth seized one of the wrists of the British commander.

He was taken so wholly by surprise that he did not think to try to use his sword at all.

Quick as a flash Dick and Bob each placed the muzzle of his pistol against the British general's head.

"Halt! Stand where you are!" cried Dick, in a grim, determined voice. "Take one step nearer, or attempt to level your muskets, and your commander is a dead man!"

The soldiers paused as if they had been shot at.

There was no mistaking the fact that Dick was thoroughly in earnest.

There was a deadly ring to his voice that was unmistakable.

General Cornwallis himself seemed to realize the fact that he was in great danger.

He turned pale.

"Hold, men!" he cried. "These young scoundrels are desperate. Don't advance until you receive the order to do so."

"You are wise in giving that order, General Cornwallis," said Dick, grimly.

Then he added:

"We are going to make our escape from here, and to that end you must go with us. You will please walk quietly along. Tell your men to remain where they are."

"Remain where you are, men!" the general said, and then he began walking along with the youths toward the entrance to the prison court.

That General Cornwallis was angry and disgusted, goes without saying.

He was so angry, he swelled up like a toad.

He seemed to be in imminent danger of bursting.

"You young scoundrels shall yet be made to suffer for this!" he growled, through his clenched teeth. "You will be sorry for this outrage."

"Oh, I hardly think so," said Dick, quietly; "it was necessary, you know. We were forced to do it."

"I'll force you to hang!"

"Perhaps so, but not right away."

Dick was cool and calm.

It seemed as if the great danger which had menaced, and which still menaced them, only had the effect of making both youths more calm and self-possessed.

This was the result of having been engaged in such hazardous work for the past five years.

They had become so accustomed to danger that even the worst danger to which they could be exposed seemed powerless to cause them to show signs of trepidation.

The youths kept a sharp watch behind them, to see that the soldiers obeyed orders and remained where they were.

The fellows did not dare do otherwise, however.

They had been ordered to remain there by General Cornwallis himself, and they had to obey.

The youths and the British officer were soon out on the street.

It was still early.

Not many people were abroad.

This made it safer for the youths than it would otherwise have been.

They had no time to spare, however.

They waited till they were near the corner of a block, and then they suddenly released the general and bounded around the corner.

"Quick! this way, men!"

General Cornwallis shouted this at the top of his voice.

He even bounded forward as if to chase the youths, but paused.

His soldiers came running and started in pursuit of the youths.

They got sight of Dick and Bob once or twice, but could not gain on them.

In fact, the youths gradually drew away from their pursuers.

They managed, also, to get through the picket line, and ran rapidly out into the country.

They were not long in reaching the clump of timber where they had left their horses the evening before.

They found their horses where they had left them.

The animals whinnied.

They were doubtless glad to see their masters.

"I'll warrant you the horses are hungry and thirsty, Bob," said Dick.

"I don't doubt it, Dick. Well, there is a stream a little way back, where they can get a drink, and as soon as we get far enough away so as to be safe we can get some feed for them.

"So we can."

The youths mounted and rode away.

They looked back, but could see no sign of redcoats, and they felt that they were safe.

"It was a close call, though, Dick," said Bob, speaking of their adventure in the prison court.

"Yes, about the closest call of all that we have had, Bob," agreed Dick.

The youths, by hard riding, reached the encampment of the patriot army that evening.

The encampment was across the River Dan, and distant about thirty-five miles from Hillsboro.

They reported to General Greene at once.

"So Cornwallis has taken up headquarters in Hillsboro, and is recruiting his army with Tories, is he?" remarked Greene, when he had heard Dick's report.

"Yes, sir; that is what he is doing," replied Dick.

"Very well; we will have to put a stop to that. We will

cross the Dan and see if we can do something to worry the British."

That he did do so is a matter of history.

He crossed the Dan with his army, and the battle of Guilford took place not long afterward.

Of this campaign and battle we may have more to say at another time.

THE END.

The next number (23) of "The Liberty Boys of '76" will contain "THE LIBERTY BOYS ON THEIR METTLE; OR, MAKING IT WARM FOR THE REDCOATS," by Harry Moore.

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